Reducing Intimate Partner Homicide Rates
What are the Risk Factors for Death when a Woman is being Abused?

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Goals of the CWHRS

- Identify **risk factors** for death or life-threatening injury when a woman is being abused by an intimate partner.

- Provide **vital information** to those working directly with women in abusive relationships.

December 3, 2008  
IL Criminal Justice Information Auth.
Intimate Partner Homicides in Chicago, 1965-2000

The graph illustrates the number of homicide victims from 1965 to 2000, categorized by gender and sexual orientation. The lines represent different groups:

- **Red line**: man killed woman
- **Black line**: woman killed man
- **Pink line**: same-sex, women
- **Green line**: same-sex, men

The data shows a decline in the number of homicides over the years, with the red line (man killed woman) showing the highest number initially and then decreasing. The other lines also show a downward trend, with the same-sex, men line being the least visible due to its lower values.
to reach these goals, the CWHRS designed a Lethal vs. Nonlethal study

- Non-lethal
  - Face-to-face interviews with 500 physically abused women.

- Lethal
  - The same interviews with friends and family of all 87 women and men killed in an intimate relationship in two years.
These challenges could never have been met without the close, long-term collaboration of many agencies and individuals.
Collaborating Agencies

- IL Criminal Justice Information Authority
- Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office
- Chicago Department of Public Health
- Erie Family Health Center
- Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence
- Cook County Hospital
- Chicago Police Department
Collaborating Individuals

- Coordinators at health-care sites and the Medical Examiner’s Office
- Project Counselor
- Advocates and Activists
- CWHRS Interviewers
- Experienced DV researchers in Chicago, other US cities, Canada
Clinic/Hospital Sample:

Initial Interview

- about 2,740 women screened (at point of service in Chicago clinics and hospitals)
- 705 women interviewed (age 18 or older and in a relationship in the past year)
  - 500 who had each experienced physical violence at the hands of her intimate partner in the previous year
  - 205 comparison women (had not experienced violence in past year)
Clinic/Hospital Sample: Follow-up Interviews

323 of the 500 women completed at least one follow-up interview

- 46% had no follow-up incident
- 25% had at least one violent follow-up incident, with none very severe
- 29% had at least one violent follow-up incident that was very severe or life-threatening
Homicide Sample: Cases

All 87 intimate partner homicides with a woman victim or offender occurring in Chicago between 1995-1996.

- 57 homicides with a woman victim and man offender
- 28 homicides with a man victim and woman offender
- 2 homicides with a woman victim and offender
Homicide Sample: Data

- Interviews (76 homicides)
  - “proxy” interviews (friend, family member or other knowledgeable person)
  - interviews of the woman offender

- Official or public records (all 87)
  - Medical Examiner’s Office Records
  - Chicago Homicide Dataset
  - Newspapers
  - Orders of Protection, Court Records, etc.
What do CWHRS results tell us about reducing the risk of serious injury or death in intimate partner violence?
Past Violence

as a Risk Factor for Homicide

most women homicide victims (88%) and offenders (81%) had experienced violence at the hands of their partner in the past year.

29% of abused clinic/hospital women experienced at least one severe or life-threatening incident in the follow-up period.
What were the riskiest kinds of Past Violence?

- **Type**
  - use of a weapon
  - an attempt to strangle or choke

- **Recency** (number of days since the last incident)

- **Frequency**; increase in frequency
Type of Past-year Violence

→ Firearm threat or use against her.
  ▶ 21% of all abused women (lethal and non-lethal) who had experienced a firearm incident in the past year were in the homicide sample, versus 7% who had not experienced a firearm incident.

→ Knife threat or use against her.
  ▶ 16% of all abused women (lethal and non-lethal) who had experienced a knife incident in the past year were in the homicide sample, versus 6% who had not experienced a knife incident.

→ Attempt to strangle or choke her.
  ▶ 12% of all abused women (lethal and non-lethal) who had experienced an attempt to choke or strangle her in an incident in the past year were in the homicide sample, versus 6% who had not experienced a choking incident.
Recency

When was the most recent violent incident against her?
(days before the interview or the homicide)

Strong relationship to lethal outcome.
- Most recent violence the same day: 19% lethal outcome
- 25 hours to 6 days: 17% lethal outcome
- 7 to 30 days: 12% lethal outcome
- 31 to 180 days: 7% lethal outcome
- 181 days to a year: 3% lethal outcome

Who had experienced most recent violence?
- Women homicide offenders: 69% in past week
- Women homicide victims: 33% in past week
- Clinic women with severe violence: 28% in past week
- Clinic women with other violence: 17% in past week
Frequency
Was violence increasing in frequency?

Relationship to lethal outcome.
- Frequency increasing: 14% had lethal outcome.
- Frequency not increasing: 8% had lethal outcome.

Who had been experiencing an increase in the frequency of the violence?
- Women homicide offenders: 72%
- Women homicide victims: 46%
- Clinic women, severe or life-threatening violence: 48%
- Clinic women with other violence: 22%
Risk factors for a Fatal Incident

The 500 abused clinic/hospital women told us about 5,016 incidents. How did the 59 fatal incidents (where the woman died) differ from these 5,016 non-fatal incidents? The woman was more likely to die if:

- **Partner used or threatened to use a gun**
  - 23% of firearm incidents (versus 1%) had a lethal outcome.

- **Partner used or threatened to use a knife**
  - 35% of knife incidents (versus 1%) had a lethal outcome.

- **Partner choked or tried to strangle her**
  - 5% of choking incidents (versus 1%) had a lethal outcome.

- **Both she and her partner were drunk**
  - 14% of incidents where both had been drinking (versus 1%) had a lethal outcome.
However,

the First Incident can be Fatal

Clinic/ hospital women who had experienced only one incident in the past year:

- 12% of the 141 incidents were life-threatening (internal or permanent injury, head injury, lost consciousness, attempted murder, wounds from a weapon or weapon threat).
- another 28% were very severe (beaten up, choked, burned, broken bones or teeth, miscarriage).

Homicides with good information:

- 12% of the 50 women killed by a man had not experienced violence against her in the past year.
- 12% of the 26 women who killed a man had no prior violence against her & the man initiated the fatal attack.
Risk factors for a First Fatal Incident

→ his drug use
→ his violence outside the home
Does partner use drugs?
- homicide, no prior violence against her: 57%
- single incident, life-threatening: 47%
- single incident, not “serious”: 37%
- not abused in past year: 5%
Partner's Violence Outside the Home

Is partner violent outside the home?
- homicide, no prior violence against her: 40%
- single incident, life-threatening: 50%
- single incident, not “serious”: 37%
- not abused in past year: 5%
Q: “Why didn’t she leave?”
A: Women do try to leave

Who left or tried to leave in the past year?

- 86% of clinic women with severe or life-threatening violence.
- 79% of abused women homicide victims.
- 70% of abused women homicide offenders.
- 62% of clinic women with “less severe” violence.
- 24% of non-abused women (comparison sample).
Leaving as a Risk Factor

Positive aftermath:
- Woman’s risk of being killed by that partner declines if she has no more contact with him/her.
- Women who left or tried to leave were less likely to experience follow-up partner violence (44% vs. 64%), if the previous violence was not severe.

Negative aftermath:
- Woman’s partner may use increased violence to keep her from leaving.
- The increased violence may result in death.
Leaving can be Fatal

Homicide Evidence:
- Her attempt to leave was an immediate precipitating factor in 51% of homicides where a man killed a woman.

Clinic/hospital Evidence:
- When a woman tried to leave but the violence continued anyway, future violence was more likely to be severe than if she hadn’t tried to leave (70% vs. 43%).
Risk factors for an abused woman

Killing her Partner

➡️ More severe, increasing violence

➡️ Fewer resources
   ◆ unemployed, no high school education
   ◆ poorer health, older

➡️ More traditional relationship
   ◆ married, long-term relationship
   ◆ had at least one child
Women Offenders had More Severe Past Violence

Increasing in frequency in past year
- 72% of abused women offenders, 46% of women victims, 38% of abused clinic women.

More severe types of violence
- choked or strangled in past year
  - 81% of abused women offenders, 67% of women victims, 47% of abused clinic women.
- weapon used against her in past year
  - 51% of women offenders, 42% of victims, 13% of abused clinic women.
Women Offenders had Fewer Resources

- 57% in fair or poor health
  - (40% of women victims, 37% of abused clinic women)

- 38% aged 41 or older
  - (16% of women victims, 15% of abused clinic women)

- 28% had a high school degree
  - (62% of women victims, 52% of abused clinic women)

- 80% unemployed
  - (43% of women victims, 51% of abused clinic women)
Women Offenders had a More Traditional Relationship

 Married to partner
  - 29% of abused women offenders, 12% of women victims, 17% of abused clinic women.

 Long-term relationship
  - 55% of abused women offenders were in the relationship five years or longer, 33% of women victims, 32% of abused clinic women.

 Children with partner
  - 48% of abused women offenders had at least one child with the partner, 33% of women victims, 44% of abused clinic women.
Seeking Help

Most women had sought help after an incident in the past year, either formal (counseling, medical, police) or informal (talking with someone).

But -

- 15% of severely-abused clinic women had not sought help in the past year.
- 37% of severely-abused clinic women had not sought any FORMAL help in past year.
- These are “Hidden Women” – at risk of serious injury or death but unknown to any helping agency.
Seeking Formal Help

Who was likely to seek help from an agency, medical care, or the police?
- clinic/hospital women with severe violence (69%)
  vs. other abused women (38%)
- abused women who were killed (55%)
- abused women who killed their partner (75%)

Just by seeking help, a woman lets you know that her situation may be serious.
Seeking Medical Help

Who sought medical help?

- 33% of abused women homicide offenders
- 27% of abused women homicide victims
- 41% of severely-abused clinic women
- 11% of less severely-abused clinic women

Latina/Hispanic women were less likely to seek medical care than were other abused women.

- 29% of severely-abused clinic women (versus 43%)
- 6% of less severely-abused clinic women (versus 13%)
Seeking help from the Police

Who was likely to call the police?

- 72% of abused women homicide offenders
- 53% of abused women homicide victims
- 52% of severely-abused clinic women
- 25% of less severely-abused clinic women

Latina/Hispanic women were less likely to call the police (28% vs. 41%) than were other abused women.

Women abused by a woman seldom contacted the police (11% vs. 40% of other women).
Few Women Sought Help from an Agency or Counselor

- Who saw a counselor?
  - 7% of abused women homicide offenders
  - 17% of abused women homicide victims
  - 24% of severely-abused clinic women
  - 13% of less severely-abused clinic women

- But 34% of severely-abused women who had contacted the police (vs. 13% of others)

- and 41% of severely-abused women who sought medical care (vs. 12% of others)

- Medical staff and the police may be “gatekeepers”
Implications for Research

- Recognize the complexity of women’s lives.
- Develop a collaborative culture.
- Measure “strangulation” as a method of violence.
Implications for PRACTICE

Assessing Risk of Death
When a woman is physically abused by an intimate partner, ask her:

- When did the last incident happen?
- Were you choked (strangled), or threatened with a gun or knife?
- Has the violence been increasing in frequency?
When a woman is not physically abused, ask her:

- Is your partner violent outside the home?
- Does your partner use drugs?
- Does your partner control all or most of your daily activities?
- Is your partner violently and constantly jealous of you?
For all women . . . . . . .

⇒ provide a safe place for her to talk to you.
⇒ keep asking.
⇒ listen.
⇒ be there when she is ready.
⇒ be able to refer her to helping resources.
For more information, see

http://www.icjia.state.il.us
Search for: CWHRS